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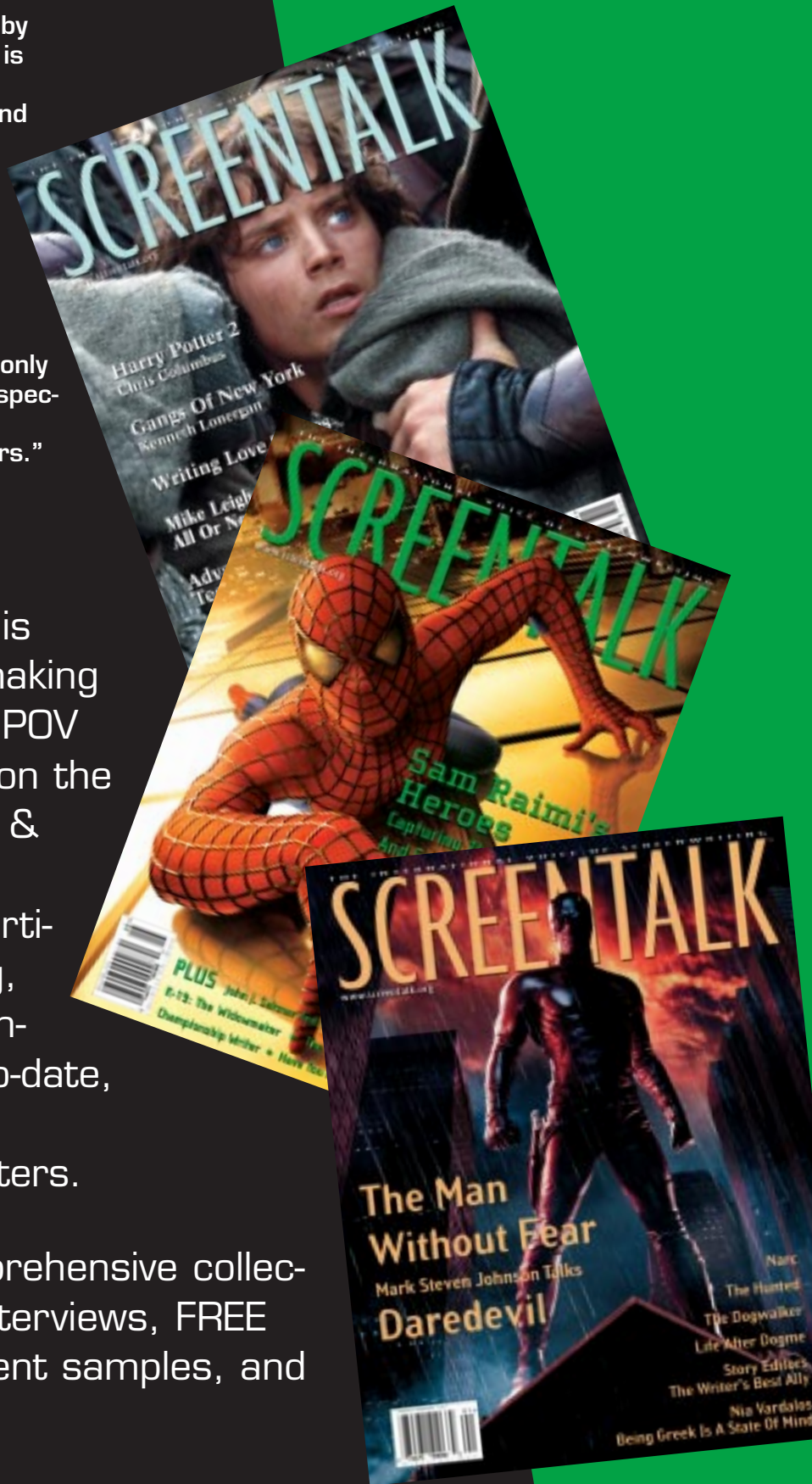
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My OWN PRiVaTE IDAHO

a story by Gus Van Sant

May '87

IDAHO

A boy enters the frame wearing an oversized Texaco gas station attendant's shirt with the name MIKE sewn on it. His name is George. He is a twelve year old Chicano. He has a six year old dog with him that looks like an Austrailian Dingo. The clouds are puffy against a deep blue sky. The road is red, with a solid white line dividing the road in two lanes.

George looks at the road, he talks to something off screen. He says, " You can always tell where you are by the way the road looks. Like I just know that I been to this place before. I just know that I been stuck here like this one fuckin' time before, you know that?"

The one that he is talking to on the side of the road is a rabbit. A jackrabbit. "There ain't no other road on earth that looks like this road. I mean, exactly like this road. (sniff) One of a kind. (sniff) Like someone's face. Like a fucked up face..." The road has a definite face - two distant cactus for eyes - a cloud's shadow for mouth, mountains for hair. "...once you see it, even for a second, you remember it, and you better not forget it, you gotta remember people and who they are, right? You gotta remember the road and where it is too ...say, jack!" George steps toward the rabbit quickly and it scammers away.

George laughs. "I just love to scare things...I don't know, it gives you a sense of...I don't know...power."

George looks at the road. The road looks back. He looks at the road, his eyes growing heavy. The road looks back. He looks at the road. It looks back. He falls asleep.

SAN FRANCISCO

George sleeps in downtown San Francisco, near a shopowner who was washing his windows, and three other street kids, Gary, Ray and Sparky are hanging around on the corner with him. While George slept, the other three were arguing among themselves about the coffee growers in Nicaragua. Their discussion was quite astute, accounting for the limited information each possessed on the subject. Their discussion is interrupted exactly twice by a man in a car that keeps stopping where they sit.

The first time the man stops he says nothing. Gary, who was hitting a wastebasket with a broomstick, paused for a moment and posed, because the man was driving a Mercedes-Benz. The others laugh at Gary, but they are also interested in the man in the Mercedes-Benz, except for George who is still asleep. Ray ventures, "What's up?" But the man in the car speeds off.

The second time the Mercedes-Benz stops the man says something, but because of a thick German accent, the boys donot understand .

The man tried talking with Gary but they couldn't understand each other, so the man left.

George was sleeping. When he was asleep he had the most remarkable dreams. Most of the time they were dreams in which George was flying. Today he was dreaming of flying between the buildings and above the traffic of the city street.

Ray, the oldest boy, was a thick muscled Argentinian-American who's father was a Gaucho. He is wearing a belt of coins that supposedly belonged to his father. Ray says, "Nobody gonna find him. He killed a guy and split. Nobody gonna find that fuck. I never gonna find him."

Ray spit into the gutter and the spit drifted in a small stream made by the shopowner who was washing his windows, down the street and into a drainage grating.

1

George said, "Man, its like its three in the afternoon and I'm hanging out with Sparky and he's telling me how he has got this new chick and he is after her and this and that, and all of a sudden its like someone turned out the lights and its about eleven thirty in the evening, like that, Sparky is gone, and its eleven thirty. I don't know if I fell asleep or what."

The city night was cold and wet. There are no signs of life

this night. Ray and Little George stood in a shop window under an awning out of the fog. Ray smokes a cigarette and checks himself in the shop window reflection. The Mercedes-Benz of earlier, slowly creeps down the street, and stops near Ray. Ray flicks his cigarette in the direction of the car. In the driver's window is a pretty woman wearing a white stole. George said, "Look, that bitch is living in a new car ad." Ray runs to the car, and after a short chat with the woman, he and Little George get inside.

Outside a large colonial style home, Ray told Little George to wait until he came back. George disappointedly sat by a tree on the lawn and fell asleep.

Inside the house, Ray met Gary and Sparky, who were waiting on the woman's living room sofa. She told all three of them to make themselves comfortable while she "Got ready."

"She likes us..." Gary explained, "...and she needs three of us, because she comes so slow, and we come too fast." He shrugged and said, "What are you going to do?"

I

Sparky and Ray struggled with Little George's body. They couldn't decide what to do with him, so they rolled him into the bushes while they waited for a cab to pick them up. "He'll be safer here than downtown." Gary said.

"Does he always pull this shit? Does he always fall asleep in the middle of nowhere?" Sparky asked.

"He had a hard beginning, his mother said she could hear him crying in the womb, even before he was born." Ray said.

I

"Strange, isn't it?" a voice said to George as he lay sleeping by the side of the road. He was waking but he was so far down in the bushes that he couldn't find where the voice was coming from. As he lifted his eyes - through the leaves and the trees he could see the Mercedes-Benz parked on the road. But instead of the woman with the white stole, it was the man with the thick German accent. "Strange, isn't it?" he asked.

"Strange that vee meet again. I again in ze car, you again azleep. But ha! How zilly, you vere azleep, zo how could you remember, I mean..." and his words turned into German, a language that George did not understand.

"Are you okay?" The man asked.

"Go home!" George said, usually grumpy when he woke up. The Mercedes pulled away. George stepped out of the bushes, in the middle of an upper-middleclass neighborhood. The houses lined the street, each with a little California style garden. George could see all the roofs of the houses lift off, and the furniture inside each house fly out and circle in the air. George passed out. The Mercedes-Benz pulled up next to his sleeping head.

PORTLAND

When George wakes up he is in Ray's arms. They sit under a statue in a park. The statue is of two Indians pointing into the distance at the horizon, and on the base of the statue is written THE COMING OF THE WHITE MAN.

I

At the Broadway Cafe George bit into a hamburger.

"So how did we get to Portland, Ray?" George wondered.

"That German dick. His name is Hans. He said he found you in the bushes, he brought you to town, was going through Portland anyway, so I asked him for a ride...you can tell we're in a different city?"

"Isn't it obvious?"

"No."

"I don't remember any German guy." George said.

George bites into his hamburger again, and with his mouth full he says, "How much do you make off me when I'm asleep?"

"Just a ride, George, I don't make nothin'. Whaddya think I sell your body when you're asleep?"

"Yeah, I do."

"Who the fuck wants your body, you just got a head and legs, man, nobody wants you you're too little."

"Yeah, and nobody wants you, 'cause you're too old. Ha. But tell Hans to keep his hands off."

Ray said to George, "I think people try and get famous, so they can be invited to more parties. Come to think of it, I think that's right, because what other use does it have, you can make more money, and boss people around, but you would mainly be invited to parties, right?"

George stood at the corner of 3rd and Taylor, watching the cars drive by, a middle aged couple is window shopping near him, and they see George and remark to themselves how cute George and his dog are. George gives them a funny smile and says "Hi." to them, then he asks them for some money, and they give him a dollar.

"A dollar, oh, man, I have to feed my dog too."

And they give him another dollar. As they walk away George says to his dog, "White people are so fuckin' stupid."

Gary got out of one of the cars driving by on the street, and spied George.

"Hey, Little George, what's up...this town is for shit, isn't it? Hadda punch a date in the face last night."

"How'd you get up here, man?"

"Been here for a while. Plane. I never ride, please, too slow. Wish I hadn't. Business too slow. Goin' north. No action. Spark's here too."

"Where?"

"Dunno."

A car pulled up to the curb. Gary hustled it. "Hey man wanna

party?" Gary said to the driver as George watched him get in.

¶

Ray leaned against a light pole. A businessman in a three piece suit pulled up on an old motorcycle and Ray watched carefully as the man walked to an automated bank teller near the bike, got on it and rode away.

IDAHO

Little George, Ray and the dog were stuck on a long straight road in the desert. George was angry at Ray because he didn't think Ray knew how the motorcycle worked. Ray could hardly kick it over, the motorcycle didn't have an electric starter.

"Aren't we supposed to have helmets?" George asked.

"Shuttup, George." Ray tried starting the bike again. "If I knew it was this hard to start, I would have never turned it off."

George looks at the road and the surrounding area, it is the same road that he was stuck on in the beginning scene.

"Ray? I just know that I have been on this road before." George stares at the face in the road. Two cactus for eyes, Mountains for hair, a cloud shadow forms the mouth over a red nose road with a dotted line running down it.

¶

That night George and Ray sat next to a fire they made on the side of the road.

"What do you want to be when you grow up, George?" Ray asked.

"I want to be a pimp."

"Hey, come on now, I mean for real, I mean, what the hell you wanna be when you get older, I mean, really want to be, if you could be anything that you wanted...that kind of thing..."

"I wanna be a bum like my old man."

"No, man, George, you see, you gotta shoot higher than that, you gotta have a dream, I know it may not come true, but you gotta have one..."

"I gotta have a dream?"

"Yeah."

"Okay, okay. If I could be anything that I wanted to be... I'd wanna be one of the cooks in McDonalds, you know the ones that run the deep fry...that's what I wanna be."

I

The next morning, as Ray was trying to start the motorcycle, George looked into the distance and there was coming their way a State Police car. George moved over into the bushes and sat down away from the motorcycle. Ray was out of breath from trying to start the bike.

"Ray, look..." George said.

Ray looked in the direction of the police car.

"Looks like this is it..." Ray said.

"Yeah."

"Can't get the bike started." Ray hit the tank of the motorcycle. "Cops are on their way. Stuck in the middle of

nowhere with a stolen bike, yeah, looks like this is the end." The policeman pulled up to them and parked. He said a few words into the radio of his car, then got out and started for the boys. George got scared and ran away into the desert. The cop stood and watched, amused at his own power. He looked like he was a full blooded American Indian. George had nowhere to run and was confused which way to go. The cop looked at Ray then back at George who tripped and fell down in a cloud of dust.

"What's the matter with him?" The cop asked.

"How should I know. Guess he don't like cops."

"Looks that way, don't it?"

"That's exactly how it looks." Ray answered.

"What you kids doing out here?"

"This cycle is one bitch to turn over, but I bet you never turned one over, you aren't no motorcycle cop."

"I turned a few." The cop answered.

I

Ray walked through the desert looking for George where he dropped. He picked him up out of the dirt, spit dripping from his sleeping lips, and smacked him in the face.

"Wake up, man, the heat's off."

George would not wake up.

Outside a trailer home at night Ray dragged George's body up the front steps and knocked on the door. A man inside was reluctant to open the door but with a little prodding, Ray got him to let them inside.

¶

George woke up in the trailer home. Ray was eating a sandwich next to him. "Look George, sandwiches!" They had found their way to Ray's "Dad's" trailer. Ray hadn't seen him for four years and his dad hadn't recognized him at first. The walls were covered with velvet paintings that Ray's Dad made that were commissioned by mail order and were of people or their pets. The paintings on the walls were returns that Ray's Dad decided to keep. The discussion turned to Ray's Mom, who Ray hadn't seen since he was born.

"Want me to tell you what happened to her? Have you ever heard it? Have you Ray?" his Dad asked.

"No. I don't care."

"If you had known her you would care." His Dad said. This "Dad" was not Ray's Argentinian father, rather a surrogate who he knew when he was growing up, a man his mom had left him with when she disappeared, and he looked like a white trash expatriot of the streets. A man in his '50's.

"I know what happened to her." Ray said.

"But you don't know the whole story. One thing about the

truth, it sounds interesting. Your mom and I. We had a sort

of touch and go relationship. What? Anyway. She would see guys on the side. At night. When I wouldn't be around...maybe San Francisco or some darned place. God knows where. She would see other guys....yeah...anyway...along come this guy. A guy we both knew. A guy who was into cards. A gamblin' man. And he said that he was a Gaucho. I dunno, maybe he was, and he had a bit of money, More'n I had at that point in time. But it was funny, the way he gambled. He was not safe in the friends that he made, so his money would come and go real fast..."

"I never heard this one before." Ray said

"So this guy, your mom fell for. What? She went cookoo over this guy. Well their affair went on for a year or so, and your mom wanted to marry this guy. She was already married to me. So he said no. He didn't love her anyways. But she wanted him to marry her, and to have a little family. That's when you were born. As a matter of fact, you were really the cause of this whole mess. She wanted to make a little family and take you and this guy someplace and set something up (slaps his leg with the palm of his hand) A family thing! What? Rediculous, right? A card man. Had a bunch of money, but could have just as well lost it on his next hand. Probably did too. Well, you'll see what I'm getting at."

"That's not how I heard it." Ray said.

"Yeah, I know. You heard it from me and I'm telling it

different this time, see? So this mom of yours found herself

a fuckin' gun. I thought she was going to blow me away with it one night. Anyway whe got so into this gun. She would flash it to anybody that gave her trouble. She would sleep with it. Yeah...strange, huh? She would cook with it too. She would stir fry vegetables with the loaded gun. What? I mean... What? I used to say, politely, "Honey, don't go stirring up dinner with the gun, now, you'll blow a hole in the frying pan." What?"

Ray began to cry a little.

"And she used to do other things with this gun. Sexy things with it. Oh, boy, she was into this thing. I just thought it was some sort of weird phase that she was going through. And so anyway, this guy, who she was cookoo over, brought her to the movies one night. A drive in movie in a stolen car, don't cha know, what? And the movie was RIO BRAVO or some shit like that. And well, she went and shot this guy....don't cha know..."

"You're makin' this up as you go along, pop."

"And they didn't find him until the next show, Rio Bravo playing on the big picture. Spilled popcorn soaking up the blood."

"George laughs, "Oh, come on, how corny, man..."

"And that was your daddy, your real daddy."

"I knew that was coming....you sure do like to make me cry, pop." Ray sniffs.

"You should know these things about your past." Dad said.

After Ray's dad told his story he told Ray where he thought that the long lost mother was working.

¶

The dog rode on the gas tank and Ray and George wore sunglasses as they journeyed forward to visit Ray's mom, who worked as a waitress in the "Blue Room" of a Holiday Inn on Interstate 85 outside Boise Idaho. The motorcycle was running fine now, and the two had figured how to start it. George would push from the rear and Ray would put it in gear and jump start it.

¶

It was nighttime when they arrived at the "Blue Room" which was a nightclub connected to the Holiday Inn. There was a standup comic billed as "Shecky Crude." Ray had to ask for his mother because he didn't know what she looked like. But when he talked with the manager he was told that his mother had quit her job a year ago, and had moved south, living on a work farm near Phoenix.

¶

In the lounge, George asked a man for a quarter, and it turned out to be Hans, the Mercedes-Benz parts representative. He was very glad to see Ray and George.

Inside Hans' hotel room, Ray lounged in sudsy water in the bathtub, singing a song by the "B-52's"

-You're living in your own private Idaho
-Underground like a wild potato...

Hans was pounding on the door of the bathroom.

"I just got in the tub! Wait your turn." Ray complained

"But Ray, you don't van zum room zervice? Ya?"

"Ahh... (mimicking Hans' accent) room zervice? Ya-ya!" Ray answered, "Let me see...two hamburgers, with cheeze, onions, lettuce, tomato, no pickles. Coke and frenchfries."

"O.K. Zat is hambugger, wiz everyzing, no pickles, coke, frenchfries." Hans replied.

"Zat is correct, Hans, und make it snappy." Ray answered.

"Sank-you." Hans said.

I

"Zo, you still don't know my name." The German said, watching the two boys and the dog finish their hamburgers.

"Sure, we know your name." George said. "Hans."

"No, it is not my name. My name is Frank, Mike."

"And my name is George, Hans." Said George.

"Frank. What kinda German name is that." Ray spoke with his mouth full. "Frank to you, Hans to us."

"Oh, vell, Ray, call me Hans if you van to."

"O.K. Hans."

"Und ow are ze hambuggers, boys?"

"Pretty good, Hans." Ray said.

"Are ze buggers okay by you, Mike?"

"Good by me, Hans." Said George.

"How did you boys get so var. I only left you in Portland three days." Hans said.

"We rode a motorcycle."

"Ya?" Hans thought. "To ze "Blue Room?"

"Too many questions, Hans." Ray said "We're on business."

"Vat business."

"We're selling motorcycles." Ray said.

"Ah, I see."

"Wanna buy one?"

"Ya-sure I wanna buy one."

1

As Hans rode the motorcycle over the south pass to Picabu Idaho... a local policeman pulled him over doing 95 in a 45 mph zone.

PHOENIX

At the Boise Airport Ray and George bought a ticket to Phoenix, and put the dog in a small kennel and into the baggage area. The only baggage that they had.

A gypsy cab pulls up to two shacks on a workfarm outside of Phoenix Arizona. Ray and George and the dog get out of the car, and Ray pays the driver. The car speeds off.

George sits down on the stoop in front of one shack and Ray tries the door of the other shack. The door swings open and he goes inside and yells "Hello"...."Hello, Mom?" After Ray goes inside, a beautiful Mexican girl about Ray's age opens the door of the other shack and leans against it, looking at George. George turns around and sees the beautiful Mexican girl.

"Say goodlookin..." George says to her.

"Ola." The girl says. "Que ondas?"

"Say, come sit next to me you look fine and you look like mine."

Ray comes out of the other shack about this time, looking disappointed

"She's not here. I mean, fuck, we come all this fuckin' way, and she ain't here either, where'd she go from here?"

Ray sits down on the stoop of his shack and holds his head in his hand and begins to cry. The beautiful girl sits down next to Ray and comforts him. George gives up on her as he senses serious competition from Ray who is older and also crying.

"You a gaucho?" she asks Ray.

"What?" Ray asked, and she played with his belt.

"Yeah. I mean....yeah, sure I am."

"What happened to your horse?"

"I really don't believe this." Ray said still thinking of his mom.

"Don't have the cow about it." the beautiful girl said

"Hey, baby, don't walk, let's you and me start to talk."

Said Little George. The Mexican girl was confused.

"Aw, don't listen to him. He's just fooling around."

Ray said.

Ray and the beautiful girl talked. Ray found out that his mother had moved away, and that the beautiful Mexican girl had learned a little bit of English from her.

They began to speak in whispers so that George could not hear them. George began to ignore them and felt insulted that they were talking behind his back....then the beautiful girl and Ray went into her shack and closed the door.

George lay down and fell asleep.

When George awoke he noticed that the door to the shack where the beautiful Mexican girl lived was wide open and that Ray and the girl were gone.

1

George looked through downtown Phoenix streets to find Ray, but he could not find them.

George returned to the shack where he last saw Ray and they were putting some of her things into a waiting cab.

"Hey, George." Ray said as he closed the door of the cab and helped the beautiful girl into the front seat. "Hey, let me talk with you a second, okay?" Ray motioned George into the beautiful girl's shack.

Inside, Ray gave George some money. Half of what he had from the leftover money they got from selling the motorcycle.

"I'm gonna take some time off. I mean, maybe I'll run into you down the road." Ray said.

"Yeah, sure. Okay." George said, pretending not to be disappointed. "I've got some aunts and uncles down here, I'll be okay. I'll...I mean. Don't worry about me."

"Sorry, but..."

"No, man, forget it. Hurry up, she's waiting, you gonna lose her." George hides a tear.

"Alright. you sure that you'll be okay?"

"Don't worry about me."

Outside, the dog watched the car leave down a rutted dirt drive.

1

On the road out of town, in the desert, George found that there were some roads that did look alike, this one he was on had a face in the road too, like the one in Idaho.

George had a vision of all the cactus and sagebrush flying into

the air as if picked up by a big wind, then he lay asleep by the side of the road with his dog.

Later, Hans, the German Mercedes-Benz parts salesman drove by George's sleeping body by the side of the road. He almost didn't recognize him, but turned his car around and stopped next to George and put him and his dog in the car and drove off down the road.